Letter from Taizé

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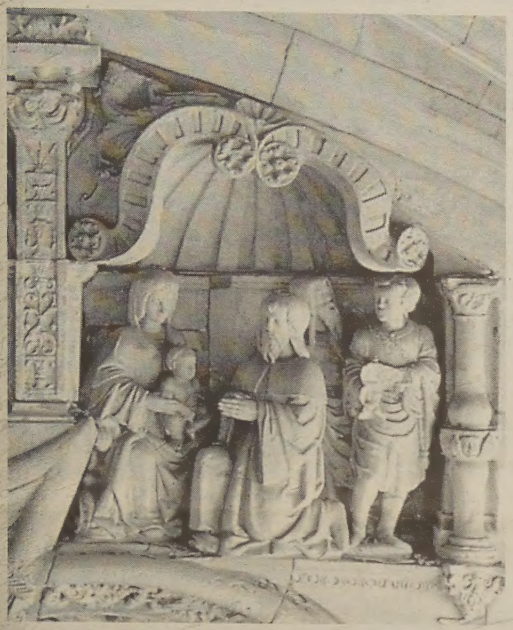


Jeronimos Monastery in Lisbon

God, you love us, and at Christmas you cause us to understand that one of the pure joys of the Gospel is to go ever further towards simplicity of heart, which leads to a simple life.

Prayer by Brother Roger

A WORKSHOP IN TAIZÉ

How Can We Fight Poverty?

Every week on the hill, at the end of the afternoon, among the various workshops offered for reflection, there are several that deal with the question of solidarity: "Fair trade: why and how?"; "What can I do to help create an economy of greater solidarity?"; "How can we fight poverty? Sharing experiences."

Without being able to sum up all that is said in this last workshop, here is some information that expresses the urgency of this struggle:

Today the world produces more wealth than ever before—trade, travel, means of communications grow steadily. But the benefits of this growth are not shared fairly: 2800 million people (almost half of the world's population) live on less than two dollars a day, and 1200 million of them barely survive on less than a dollar a day. The gap between rich and poor is constantly increasing.

The question of food illustrates this contradiction and the complexity of the challenges to be dealt with. Whereas the world produces more food than necessary, 845 million people suffer from malnutrition and the number is constantly on the rise. In the coming thirty years, world population will grow by 2000 million inhabitants. The only way to struggle against malnutrition and nourish this population will be by increasing agricultural productivity. A cubic meter of water is needed to produce a kilogram of wheat. The quantity of water on earth can neither diminish nor increase. Food will thus have to be produced where water is abundant and water kept for essential uses where it is less available. This will require arbitration between current and potential users, unequally endowed.

In September 2000, world leaders committed themselves to reach the "*objectives of the millennium for development*" by the year 2015: reduce misery and malnutrition by half; make primary education for all and the equality of the sexes a reality; reduce by two-thirds the mortality of children under five and by three-quarters the mortality of mothers; reverse the trend of the spreading of the AIDS and malaria viruses; bring about lasting economic growth and ensure the viability of the environment; establish a worldwide partnership for development, with goals for aid, sharing and debt reduction. Some countries are moving forward, but none of these objectives will be reached if things continue at their present pace.

At the end of the workshop, a time of sharing in small groups is a way of searching more concretely what each person can do in relationship to this world situation. Some questions are proposed to foster this sharing:

How can I take part in the search for greater justice?

How can I become better informed? To solve problems in advance as well as to help in situations of urgency, it is important to understand what is happening. Geographical location, climate, history and culture represent the parameters of poverty. Conflicts, corruption in government, unfair trade practices, fluctuations in the price of raw materials,

the degradation of the environment, the selfishness of nations or individuals are other factors that affect poverty. Traveling or taking part in a humanitarian project in a poor country offer possibilities to form a vision of the world and to discover the courage and vitality of those who have not hesitated to take initiatives.

Can I orient my studies towards the search for greater justice and the building up of peace?

Poverty is present at our doorstep. What can I share of my time, of my abilities? What can I change in my lifestyle, in my behavior as a consumer, to contribute to a fairer distribution of the goods of the earth? How can I join others in a NGO, a humanitarian project, an exchange program, or by starting a business?

How can I fulfill my responsibilities as a citizen (demanding that resolutions and commitments made by states be applied; respect for human rights, the Kyoto agreement, objectives of the millennium, commitments to aid for economic growth...)?

Christians know that the risen Christ is recognized in hospitality and the sharing of bread. Prayer is a concrete means of remaining in communion with the entire human family and of leaving passivity behind. How can I witness to the beatitude "Happy those who are hungry and thirsty for justice"?

YOUNG GERMANS IN TAIZÉ

A Hope for Church and for Country

Every week there are young Germans in Taizé, eager to meet people from other countries, touched by the times of silence during the prayers (so rare elsewhere), concerned about the future of their own country.

The first young Germans were shown hospitality in Taizé sixty years ago. They were prisoners of war, staying in two camps in the area. Sometimes they were given special permission to be invited, for example at Christmas. They were the great-grandparents of those who, today, come to Taizé almost every Sunday, by the hundreds or even by the thousands. Today's young visitors are a fairly faithful reflection of the makeup of the population of their country: the different regions, the proportions of Christian denominations, of baptized and unbaptized, of different educational levels. There are not many other places where such a diverse population of young Germans meets in such an intense way. Since the turning-point of 1989, those from East and West have realized that, in addition to their language, they have the songs of Taizé in common.

They reach Taizé in different ways. Those in charge of youth ministry in many Catholic and Protestant dioceses propose regular trips. Countless parishes send groups. Many young people decide spontaneously to come on their own. They take advantage of the weekly shuttle buses that, from mid-February to mid-November, come and go between Karlsruhe and Taizé. As soon as fifteen or twenty young people want to make the journey together, the bus comes to their town to get them.

For a long time now, the songs of Taizé have made their entry into Church songbooks. In many places young and not-so-young people meet for regular prayers inspired by those in Taizé: in churches, youth centers, hostels, student parishes and even in private homes. Many leave Taizé with renewed courage to get involved in youth ministry.

In November, in many German cities a "night of light" takes place using the songs of Taizé. Sometimes they fill a whole cathedral, illuminated by candles. It is prepared by the young people of a region who often have little else in common. But on that occasion they put into practice what they discovered in Taizé: the experience that Christians can come together around a common project in spite of their differences and that, even if they are many, not much is needed to live an intense prayer. Taizé brothers also prepare these kinds of prayers during large gatherings such as the *Katholikentag* or the *Kirchentag*, as well as in gatherings which are not explicitly organized by the Churches, like the upcoming "Day of the Saxons" held near Dresden.

Since the end of the totalitarian regimes in 1945 and 1989, Christians can once again make their specific contribution to society based on their own values. In this context, the youth meetings in Taizé are not only perceived as a private matter concerning only those who take part or as a purely church phenomenon. Public schools, and groups of young people undertaking a year of volunteer service or the required civil or military service come to Taizé with their teachers, chaplains or group leaders. They often come from families which have no contact with the Church. There are also young Muslims or Jews who wish to accompany their Christian friends to the meetings. In a certain number of schools, these trips have become a regular part of the school year.

Every week in Taizé, in addition to their participation in international groups, the young Germans have the possibility of reflecting among themselves on the situation of their Church and their country. What does it mean to live our faith in communion with others, not only for oneself or with those who share the same opinions? What can Christians contribute to a pluralistic and democratic society? Everyone can express themselves, and it becomes evident that many are involved in trying to better the life of their country. Often they think about their future in a land where there are fewer and fewer young people. How will the country be able to

cope with a population that is constantly growing older?

If critical voices are not lacking, hope is not lacking either. Can the crisis in which many see Germany getting bogged down, with the end of a certain material affluence, have its good sides? In recent times, young Germans have been singing traditional songs from their heritage with no complex, like people from other nations. This was unthinkable only a few years ago. That does not lessen their attention to the culture of other peoples, on the contrary.

For groups or individuals preparing for the European meeting in Lisbon, elements for creating a prayer with the songs of Taizé are given on the website www.taize.fr

This website has just been changed and updated, making it easier to find essential aspects of life in Taizé and news of the pilgrimage of trust on earth. You will also find practical information for the Lisbon meeting and the meetings held in Taizé during the year 2005.

Lisbon Taizé
28 December 2004 - 1 January 2005

PREPARING THE LISBON MEETING

"Preparation Points" in Poland

Since the fall of the Berlin wall almost fifteen years ago and the opening of borders between Eastern and Western Europe, the faithfulness of tens of thousands of young Polish people to the pilgrimage of trust on earth has never failed.

In this country of strong Catholic tradition, a large part of the population is between 17 and 30 years old. Many young people still have trust in the Church and are happy to share their faith and discover the faith of other young Europeans. In a rapidly changing society, they are also looking for reference points, a base upon which they can build, because they sense that the attractions of a consumer society cannot satisfy their yearning for happiness and freedom, their desire for a world of greater justice and solidarity, their thirst for peace.

At a time when many young Poles live in fear of unemployment, young Christians want to bring a sign of hope. Many of them come to Taizé or to the meetings the brothers organize in their country, and express their wish to take part in the preparations for the European meeting throughout the autumn months.

This takes place in the "preparation points," a flexible and temporary structure, renewed every year in different parishes. Everything is coordinated with local Church leaders, even though these points are not just for young members of the parish in question. The purpose of these points is to present the event of the meeting and to invite all those who are interested by explaining its purpose and structure. It is also an opportunity for the preparation group to get to know one another better, to reflect on the sign that is expressed by Christians who meet together in a European capital, on the sharing between nations that the pilgrimage makes possible, on the expectations of those who will offer hospitality, to discover common intuitions that can then be developed.

To animate the life of these points, teams of young people are formed and divide up the different tasks: to prepare and lead the prayer at the beginning of the meetings, to organize times of reflection and small-group sharing, to welcome newcomers, etc. Prayer is the most important moment, not just to teach people the songs of Taizé but especially to help them understand that it is the central element of the pilgrimage as well as of the life of the brothers who have invited the young people. For some, it is a surprise to discover how much time and energy is devoted to it. In fact, the prayer must be beautiful, and much effort is involved in setting up the prayer-space and preparing the music. It is an invitation to discover that God is present in our lives and looks for a personal relationship with each person. All the rest follows from this prayer because it makes possible trust, inner peace and joy.

Another important element of these meetings is the sharing in small groups. To all who wish to take part in this pilgrimage of trust, the team in charge explains the need to follow the program of preparation, which means attending seven meetings organized during the autumn months. The first four invite people to reflect on the topic of the Good News: four facets of one and the same reality, the gift of God through Jesus who reveals a God who is close to us, who makes himself known, who gathers human beings together for a communion and liberates in us our ability to love. Each of the participants receives a sheet with a Gospel text and questions to help the discussion go forward.

So that the life of the preparation points may be beautiful without requiring the organizers to spend too much time on it, the number of young people who can register is limited to 100. When the list is set, around November 15th, it is sent to Taizé where a team notes it down. Those who take part in this team, present in Taizé with two Polish Ursuline sisters, also reply to questions and try to solve problems that may arise, in collaboration with the brothers who visit the points in October and November.

FAITH

Why must we have faith to be saved?

"The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16). Salvation means being freed from all that disfigures, diminishes or destroys life. And the power that God uses to save is "the gospel of his Son" (Romans 1:9). This gospel, good news, reveals a God who gives everything—forgiveness, life, joy. That is why salvation is not limited to those who would fulfill certain conditions. It is for the good and the wicked, the wise and the foolish. God saves "everyone who has faith."

Is faith then a precondition for receiving the gift of God? If that were true, then my life, my happiness and my salvation would depend in the final analysis on me. Everything would be decided by my acceptance or my refusal. This idea does not correspond to what the Bible understands by faith. Faith is not a means we make use of in order to obtain something. It is a much humbler reality, a simple trusting that is always astonished: although I have done nothing to deserve it, God brings me back to friendship with him.

Faith is almost nothing, scarcely discernable—as small as a mustard-seed, says Jesus (Luke 17:6). At the same time, it is "more precious than gold" (1 Peter 1:7), "most holy" (Jude 20). Along with hope and love, it remains for ever (1 Corinthians 13:13). In the seventh century, Saint Maximus Confessor identified faith with the Kingdom of God. "Faith is the Kingdom of God with no visible form; the Kingdom is faith that has taken form according to God." And he adds that faith realizes "the immediate and perfect union of the believer with the God in whom he believes." Faith is not an entrance ticket to God's Kingdom. In faith itself, God is present. Whoever believes and trusts in the gospel is already united to God.

Before Christ's coming, faith was not the customary attitude to be related to God. There were extraordinary believers like Abraham, and at the key moment while crossing the Red Sea, "the people had faith in the Lord and his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31). But in daily life, faithfulness counted more than faith. The community of the first covenant was not made up of "believers" but of "the lowly," "the righteous," "the holy ones" (Psalm 34). With the gospel of Christ faith became normal and no longer exceptional, so that Jesus' disciples could call themselves simply "believers" (Acts 2:44).

For, now that the gospel has revealed God's gift with no limits and with nothing held back, salvation is offered freely. There are no longer any conditions to fulfill; all that is necessary is to have faith in it. No one is excluded from God's love, according to the words of the apostle Paul: "We have put our hope in the living God, the Saviour of all people, especially believers" (1 Timothy 4:10).

What can I do when I cannot believe?

The New Testament speaks almost as much of doubt as it does of faith. The apostles were not too surprised by how hard it was to believe, because they knew that the prophets had predicted this. Paul and John quote the words of Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed our message?" (John 12:38 & Romans 10:16). John adds, "And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart" (John 12:39-40). All four gospels refer to this passage of Isaiah 6. Faith is not automatic.

John's Gospel shows faith against the background of its opposite. From the beginning, Christ was ignored: "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him" (John 1:10-11). It is true that there was a time when many followed Jesus. But very quickly, most stopped believing in him: "Because of this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:66). And Jesus does not try to keep them. He says, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father" (John 6:65).

Christ did not try to persuade people to remain with him, because faith has a depth that goes beyond understanding and emotions. It is rooted in those places where "deep calls out to deep" (Psalm 42:7), where the depths of the human condition touch the depths of God. "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (John 6:44). Faith is inseparably born of God's activity and human will. No one believes against his will. Likewise, no one believes unless God enables that person to believe.

If faith is a gift from God and all do not believe, is that because God has rejected some people? In the passage where John quotes Isaiah on the impossibility of believing he also transmits some hopeful words of Jesus: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31). Raised up on the cross and raised up into the Father's glory, Christ "draws" as the Father "draws." How is he able to reach every human being? No one can say. But why should we not trust him in what is beyond our understanding?

Until its last page, John's Gospel shows how fragile faith is. Thomas' doubting has become proverbial. But what is decisive is that, without believing, he remains part of the community of believers—and they for their part do not throw him out! Thomas waits, the risen Christ shows himself to him, and he believes. Then Jesus says, "Happy those who believe without having seen" (John 20:29). Faith is not a feat of skill. It comes when least expected, no one knows how. It is a trust that is surprised at itself.

Holy Spirit, you never want us to be anxious, but you come to clothe us in your peace. And when there is joy drawn from the Gospel in us, it can bring a breath of new life.

JANUARY

1 Sat Lk 2:16-21
When they had seen the child Jesus in the manger, the shepherds made known what they had been told concerning him and everyone who heard was astonished. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

2 SUN Jn 1:1-18
The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the power to become children of God.

3 Mon Lk 1:67-79
Zechariah prophesied: Blessed be the Lord, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and established for us a power of salvation, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago.

4 Tue 1 Jn 5:18-21
We are in the One who is true, as we are in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

5 Wed Jn 1:1-5
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

6 Thu Ep 3:2-6
EPIPHANY
Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

7 Fri Rv 21:5-7
God says: I am the Beginning and the End. I shall give water from the well of life freely to anyone who is thirsty.

8 Sat Ba 5:1-9
Leave behind your sadness and put on for ever the beauty of God's glory. For the Lord will guide you in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

9 SUN Mt 3:13-17
When Jesus had been baptised, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice came from heaven: This is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him.

10 Mon Tt 1:1-4
Paul writes to Titus: God gives to his faithful the hope of eternal life which he promised before the beginning of time.

11 Tue Jn 1:1-5
In the beginning was the Word. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.

12 Wed Is 64:3-7
Lord, you come to the help of those who gladly do right. Keeping your ways reminds them of you.

13 Thu Tt 3:4-7
When the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any righteous things we had done, but because of his merciful love.

14 Fri Ps 113
God is on high, but bends down to both heaven and earth. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts up the needy.

15 Sat Lk 3:1-6
John the Baptist came as is written in the book of Isaiah: A voice of one who cries in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths!"

16 SUN Jn 1:29-34
John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

17 Mon Is 12:2-6
Joyfully you will draw water from the springs of salvation, and you will say, "Praise God and call on his name. Proclaim God's deeds to the nations!"

18 Tue Ac 15:5-12
Peter said: God chose me so that the nations might hear from my lips the message of the Good News and believe. God makes no distinction between human beings.

19 Wed Ep 3:1-12
Paul writes: I have become a servant of the Gospel by the gift of God's grace, which is for me to proclaim to the nations the unfathomable riches of Christ.

20 Thu Jn 14:1-10
Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

21 Fri Ps 18
You are my lamp, Lord; you light up my darkness.

22 Sat Ps 96
Sing a new song to the Lord! Praise his name! Proclaim God's salvation, day by day. Tell the nations of his glory!

23 SUN Mt 4:12-23
Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

24 Mon Mt 18:15-20
Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.

25 Tue Mk 16:15-20
Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

26 Wed Ps 62
Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope.

27 Thu 1 Th 1:1-5
Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: our gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great effect.

28 Fri Lk 7:36-50
Jesus said to a woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were present began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

29 Sat 1 P 5:1-4
Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty, but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will.

30 SUN Mt 5:1-12
Jesus said: Blessed are you when people falsely say all kinds of things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

31 Mon Mt 22:34-40
Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar: Love your neighbour as yourself.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DAILY READINGS

FEBRUARY

DAILY READINGS

1 Tue (2 Co 1:18-24) Paul explained his ministry, saying: We do not want to be masters of your faith, but fellow workers with you for your joy.

2 Wed (Lk 2:22-32) PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When he saw the child Jesus, Simeon praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.

3 Thu (Ex 3:1-15) Moses said to God, "If I tell the people: 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am; thus you shall say to them, '"I am" has sent me to you.'"

4 Fri (Ps 34) The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those whose spirit is crushed.

5 Sat (1 S 12:20-24) Adore only God; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

6 SUN (Mt 5:13-16) Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden.

7 Mon (Mk 2:13-14) As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And Levi got up and followed him.

8 Tue (Ps 55:17-19) To God I call and he saves me, evening, morning and at noon. God's peace delivers my soul, for he hears my cry.

9 Wed (Mt 6:1-6) ASH WEDNESDAY Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

10 Thu (Is 42:10-17) The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

11 Fri (Mt 21:28-31) Jesus said: A father said to his two sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The first replied, "I will not," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The second replied, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? Those listening said, "The first."

12 Sat (Ps 147) Give praise to the Lord! It is good to sing praises to the one who heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

13 SUN (Mt 4:1-11) Jesus said to the tempter: Away with you! For Scripture says, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone".

14 Mon (1 Co 13:1-13) Love is patient and kind. Love does not seek its own advantage, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth.

15 Tue (Jm 1:12-15) James writes: Let no one say when they are tempted, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

16 Wed (Is 43:18-21) The Lord says: Look, I am doing something new, even now it is emerging, do you not see it? Yes, I am making a way in the desert and my people will sing my praises.

17 Thu (Is 45:18-19) The Lord says: I did not tell my people to search for me in chaos. I am the Lord God, who proclaims justice, who speaks what is true.

18 Fri (Mk 2:15-17) Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

19 Sat (Ps 19) The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

20 SUN (Mt 17:1-9) At the transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."

21 Mon (2 P 1:5-8) Seek perseverance, true devotion, mutual kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

22 Tue (Mk 1:40-45) A leper came to Jesus and said, "if you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

23 Wed (Is 40:1-5) Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

24 Thu (Mt 6:7-15) Jesus said: Some think that by using many words in their prayer, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

25 Fri (Is 6:1-8) In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

26 Sat (Mk 4:1-9,13-20) Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

27 SUN (Jn 4:1-42) Jesus said: My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to complete his work.

28 Mon (Ps 51) O God, you desire truth in the inward being. Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

You love us, God, and the contemplation of your forgiveness becomes a ray of goodness in the humble hearts that, by day and by night, entrust themselves to you.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

January: Genesis 2:8-9,15-17

God places the human being he has just created in a magnificent garden, with the tree of life at the centre. What better way to show that God desires the fullness of life for us, that we are made for happiness? And this happiness does not consist only in leisure: Adam is placed in the garden "to till it and keep it." Work is a means of collaborating with God.

But the tree of life is shadowed by another tree: "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In Biblical terms, this means "the tree of knowing how to live a good life." In Semitic languages, the use of pairs of opposites often is used to indicate a totality. In the Bible, the question "what should we do to lead a life that is good, full, successful?" pertains to the domain of wisdom. Being wise is not a question of having read many books, but rather of making the choices necessary to live in the right way. As opposed to plants or animals, human life requires a great many choices. By placing these two trees together, the Bible story expresses the fact that to find true life we must gain wisdom.

But how can we acquire this essential wisdom? The Bible gives us this answer: by listening to God's Word. That is the meaning of the "commandment" in verses 16-17. For the Jews, this referred to the Torah, a word often translated by "law" but whose primary meaning is "teaching." Here, God tries to explain to human beings the road to life and happiness. Humans must first use their freedom and intelligence to discover the world in which they have been placed. But this teaching also has a negative side to it, because human liberty is not unlimited. True wisdom is a matter among other things of discovering and accepting our limits, which requires and motivates trust in our Creator.

- What brings me happiness? What takes it away?
- How can I perform my work and other activities as a way of collaborating with God?
- Can our limits ever be something positive? What enables us to accept them?

February: John 6:22-34

"The work of God is to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). For John, faith is the heart of Christian life. Believing means trusting in Jesus, welcoming the mystery of his being. That explains why, in John's Gospel, expressions like "recognize," "welcome," "see" and "come to" are synonyms for believing. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). The object of faith is the person Jesus, who comes to satisfy the deepest longings of human beings.

To believe, according to John, we need signs. Faith is awakened by sight. Seeing comes before believing. When Jesus awakens Lazarus from the dead, "many who had come and saw what Jesus had done believed in him" (John 11:45). When Peter and the disciple Jesus loved "saw" the empty tomb, they "believed" (John 20:8).

In the text from John, the crowd also saw a great sign, the multiplication of the loaves. Thinking that they had found the Messiah, they went looking for him. But even if the crowd saw a remarkable sign, the people did not understand its true meaning. Seeing is only a first step on the road that leads to faith. Step by step, Jesus will invite them not to stop on the way.

First of all, by going off into the hills when they come to try and make him king, Jesus wants them to see that he is not the Messiah they expect. Sometimes, what keeps us from believing is our preconceived ideas. Since Jesus does not react in the way they imagine, the crowd does not understand what he is doing.

Then, Jesus wants to help them recognize the true reason they are looking for him. The crowd did not understand that Jesus is the bread of life. They looked for him because they were hungry and were fed. What keeps us from believing is to be fascinated by the sign but unable to go beyond it. In faith we are always invited to take another step forward, to "work for the food that remains to eternal life."

- What "signs" have helped me to believe?
- What nourishes and sustains my faith?
- How do I understand these words of Jesus: "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Cambodia

Helping the Community of Believers to Move Forward

From July to October, three girls from Cambodia were in Taizé to help with the organization of the meetings. They came from three different dioceses: Phnom Penh, Battambang and Kampong Cham. One of them, Socheat, explains briefly her involvement in the life of the small Christian minority of the country.

My name is Socheat; I come from the apostolic prefecture of Kampong Cham. Before, my family was not Christian; my parents were Buddhists. Because of the war and the Pol Pot regime, we had to flee to the border with Thailand, to a refugee camp. There we met Christian friends and we decided to join them in their faith. I was baptized in 1989.

Later, in 1993, my family returned to Cambodia. We were the only Catholics in our village. After a while, the priests and religious became accustomed to visiting us to support us, to pray with us and to instruct us. Little by little, many people from our village decided to join us. Some of them have already received baptism, and others are preparing for it.

Now I live with the "Lovers of the Cross" Sisters in Kampong Cham. I teach sewing. The Catholic Church built a welcome center for girls from poor families who could not be sent to school. We try to help them to have a future by teaching them to sew.

On Sundays, I go with a priest and a sister to the villages to teach catechism. The fact of giving people a possibility to discover something about the faith gives me the feeling that I am helping the community of believers to move forward. I like to work with young people and children very much, and I think this is the best way for me to serve God and to give glory to him.

Guatemala

"True respect for human rights is peace!"

My name is Sergio Lopez and I come from San Marcos, one of the regions of the "country of the everlasting springtime," otherwise known as Guatemala! It is a beautiful name because it refers to the conquest of freedom by the Mayan,

Mam and Kaqchiquel peoples. But at the same time, it is a name that can easily be identified with the poverty, hunger and misery that affect our land. Eight out of ten Guatemalans live below the poverty line, and six are in a situation of extreme poverty. Thirty-six years of armed conflict have made this situation still more critical.

Today, attacks against human rights are common: political assassinations, rapes, severe injustice in the working world, violence within families—and all this despite the fact that in 1996 a peace treaty was signed between the government and the paramilitary groups.

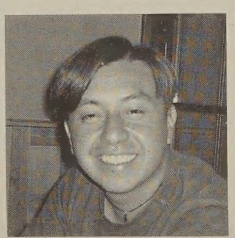
Signing the peace treaty was the end of the war, but only the beginning of the true building up of peace! What can young people do to contribute to this?

In my region, I take part in a large campaign to create awareness among young people about defending and promoting human rights. As our work has gone on, different projects have been begun: a song and drawing contest on the theme of peace; radio programs on five local radios to spread the topic of human rights; workshops on how to promote a culture of peace, on alternative ways of resolving conflicts; opening a library specially dedicated to human rights. Personally I work with legal aid that we try to bring to farm workers in conflict with their employers. In addition to supporting them in defending their rights, we go to visit them regularly to bring them medicine, food and clothing with the help of different NGOs.

To conclude, I would like to invite you, in your own social reality, from your own field of action, with your own strengths and weaknesses, to join us in promoting everywhere the protection of life and respect for human dignity. I will end with the words of Bishop Gerardi, assassinated on April 24, 1998 by a paramilitary group because of his freedom of expression: "True respect for human rights is peace!"

Echoes of the Forum:

Every Saturday afternoon in Taizé, young people from other continents who have come to Taizé for two or three months to help in the work of welcoming people are given a chance to speak. At the end of the week, when all the participants are preparing to return home, each one is invited to put into practice the little bit he or she has grasped of the Gospel. The forum helps them to discover how faith leads some young people from the Southern continents to use their energy and creativity to serve others in response to the current challenges of their societies.



Bangladesh

Sing to the Tune of a New Life

Some years back, through the inspiration of the Taizé brothers in Mymensingh, pilgrimages for the disabled and for persons with differing mental capacities were embarked on. Gradually this concern for marginalized persons has expanded until five different dioceses accepted these special people on pilgrimage to their areas. One of the participants, Father Douglas F. Venne, tells of the pilgrimage to Danjuri parish in Birampur, Dinajpur.

We started from Mymensingh by bus on Wednesday 17 March. On the bus were some forty persons. Thursday after eating, all came together under the cloth tent top in a big space outside the front door of the church. In order to show some of the spirit right then, groups from different places or different tribal backgrounds were asked to sing some tunes together, expressing their culture's riches. The pilgrimage was off to a good start.

After prayer and breakfast the next day, the group was broken into parts: the adults and those who could understand principles and ways of sharing stayed under the Big Top. They were asked to share their experiences as handicapped persons and as a sometimes ignored group. The second group of youngsters and those whose minds have remained on simple levels were taken to the schoolyard. They were to discover with their hands, eyes, ears and voices how to work together, even though their talents varied. Under the direction of Naomi, a lady from Japan, the first task was to show that they were all for peace. A large dove was drawn on a mat. Bits of different colored, leaf-shaped cloth were given out to each child or grown person who was accompanied by a helper. The whole group became engrossed in making cloth flowers according to their ability. Each participant took his or her handmade flower and put it on the mat with the big peace dove. The mat was ablaze with color. Now there was a need to celebrate; balloons were distributed. A few grains of rice were dropped inside the balloons and the child had a bouncing noisemaker. A long rope was brought forward. The mat with the dove and flowers marched in front. All the children and other participants held one hand on the rope and bounced their balloons while they walked along the village paths proclaiming peace to all.

On Friday, the pilgrims gathered for the Stations of the Cross, spread out over the parish and school area. A different person carried a light-weight wooden Cross to each of the stations. A lame person, a crippled man, a lady in a wheel chair, a person who had difficulty in walking, another invalid in a wheel chair and so on. It was an impressive scene for the so-called healthy.

Sunday morning, Bishop Moses led us in Mass. When it was time to bring up the gifts, the usual line of persons followed one after another to hand Bishop Moses those gifts. But with a difference—one on crutches, two in wheel chairs, one whose legs want to go in many directions at the same time. God accepts the persons bringing up the gifts just as he made them, fully and lovingly. Yes, "sing to the tune of a new life".

http://www.taize.fr/en_article943.html

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